

Investors pivot to Asia, AI amid global volatility

HSBC survey finds

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Business leaders and institutional investors are increasingly turning to Asia and artificial intelligence (AI) as they reposition for growth in an uncertain global environment, according to a new survey by the Hong Kong and Shanghai Banking Corporation PLC (HSBC).

Conducted among 3,000 international businesses and institutional investors across 10 markets ahead of the bank's annual Global Investment Summit, the survey shows that companies remain resilient despite a decade of global shocks and are continuing to invest.

An overwhelming 94 percent of respondents said they still see strong opportunities for international growth, while 87 percent indicated a greater willingness to take calculated risks compared to five years ago. Nearly three in four (72 percent) expect moderate to significant repositioning of their businesses over the next three years.

Asia, particularly mainland China, has emerged as a key focus area. Around 41 percent of decision-makers identified mainland China as the market likely to grow most in importance to their economic relationships over the next five years – more than any other region globally.

At the same time, 93 percent of organisations plan to increase cross-border trade or investment over the next five years, with 91 percent expecting these flows to become more regionally concentrated.

AI and technology are now central to global investment decisions. About 50 percent of respondents cited access to AI, critical technologies and infrastructure as a top influence on international strategy, on par with market growth and client demand.

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Moreover, 51 percent pointed to strong AI and data infrastructure, along with competitive energy costs, as key drivers when increasing exposure to specific markets.

Respondents expect AI to deliver major benefits in the near term, including improved productivity and workforce efficiency (56 percent), enhanced forecasting and modelling (48 percent), and greater innovation alongside cost savings (46 percent).

Notably, 32 percent believe AI will fundamentally reshape their core business models within three years.

Institutional investors are already acting on this shift, with 49 percent identifying increased exposure to AI and technology themes as their primary portfolio strategy for 2026. Only 14 percent expect to make no significant changes to their approach.

The survey also highlights a structural shift in how businesses view volatility. About 95 percent of respondents now see volatility as a permanent feature of the global economy rather than a temporary disruption.

In response, 88 percent have recalibrated their capital allocation

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India hikes fertiliser subsidy

AFP, New Delhi

India has hiked subsidies for farming fertilisers by 11 percent from last year to support its vast agriculture sector from surging prices sparked by the Middle East war.

The agricultural sector helps sustain over 45 percent of people in India, the world's most populous nation, making it an influential voting bloc.

"The subsidy would be provided to the fertiliser companies as per approved and notified rates, so that fertilisers are made available to farmers at affordable prices," a cabinet statement on Wednesday read.

Individual farms are small and often unproductive, and successive Indian governments have regularly intervened to protect them from foreign competition.

"In view of the recent trends in the international prices of fertilisers and inputs like urea...government has decided to approve the NBS (Nutrient Based Subsidy) rates," it added.

The 415 billion rupees (\$4.48 billion) scheme will run for six months for the summer crops, beginning this month. Disruptions to fertiliser supplies caused by the Middle East war pose a double threat to global food security through scarcity and high prices, the World Trade Organization warned last month.

Iran's restrictions on the Strait of Hormuz during the conflict choked a vital transit route for oil and gas – as well as fertilisers.

A third of the world's fertilisers normally transit the strait, and the disruption has prompted multiple warnings about the impact on food production.



PHOTO: MD QUAMRUL ISLAM RUBAIYAT

Tractors loaded with potatoes wait outside a cold storage in Thakurgaon. The photo was taken recently.

With cold storages nearly full, farmers sell potatoes at a loss

MD QUAMRUL ISLAM RUBAIYAT and SUKANTA HALDER

A surge in potato supply at the peak of the harvest season has pushed cold storage facilities close to full, leaving farmers with little choice but to sell at rock-bottom rates.

Potato stocks at cold storage facilities across the country have already reached 80 percent of capacity, according to the Bangladesh Cold Storage Association.

In the north, many facilities are packed to the brim. Only about 20 percent space remains in Munshiganj, one of the country's largest potato-growing districts, said Mostofa Azad Chowdhury Babu, president of the association.

At the field level, prices have slid sharply within days. Potatoes that fetched Tk 13 to Tk 14 per kg earlier are now selling for Tk 8 to Tk 10. However, production costs this season were between Tk 13 and Tk 15 per kg.

Babu said untimely rain damaged part of the crop, which could lift prices in the June-July period this year.

For that to happen, farmers would need to store their harvest and wait until rates climb to around Tk 30 per kg. If that materialises, growers may earn Tk 3 to Tk 5 per kg after covering production and storage costs, he estimated.

Many farmers say that the option is out of their reach.

Potato growers across northern districts said that storage space has dried up. With rain threatening further damage and temperatures soaring, they are rushing to offload produce before it spoils.

For some, this season's hardship compounds last year's losses.

For example, Tarikul Islam, a farmer



at Thakurgaon Sadar upazila, is still trying to recover from a poor season. He borrowed money and planted potatoes on 3.50 acres, harvesting about 1,470 maunds (one maund equals roughly 40 kg).

Of that, he managed to store only 125 maunds. To pay labourers and clear dues, he sold 292 maunds early at Tk 9 per kg.

"I planned to store the rest of the produce and sell it later at a better price," said the farmer. "But I couldn't secure storage slips due to space shortages. Now, with potatoes starting to rot, I have no option but to sell them quickly."

Such cases are quite common across Thakurgaon, Panchagarh and Dinajpur.

In those three districts, 46 public and private cold storage facilities can hold

about 4 lakh tonnes in total.

The Department of Agricultural Extension (DA) estimates production this season at 23.20 lakh tonnes in Dinajpur, Thakurgaon and Panchagarh alone. Storage, therefore, covers just 17.62 percent of output.

Rafiqul Islam, another farmer from Thakurgaon Sadar upazila, said he expanded potato cultivation from 4 to 6 acres this season, hoping to recoup earlier losses. He sold 100 sacks at Tk 10 per kg to meet initial expenses. Although he stored 600 sacks, another 400 remain at home.

I thought prices would improve after a month or two, he said. "But frequent rain and rising temperatures have already begun to damage the stock."

The farmer said that even at Tk 8 to Tk 8.5 per kg, buyers are scarce. Selling at such a loss is painful, but he does not see any alternative.

Malin Chandra Roy, a farmer at Bochaganj upazila in Dinajpur, said he returned home empty-handed after failing to secure space in storage facilities.

At Boda upazila of Panchagarh, farmer Abdullah Al Masum cultivated potatoes on 1 acre but found room for only 20 sacks after visiting several facilities.

"The rest will have to be sold at low prices," he said, adding that traders are wary of rain-affected potatoes for fear they may spoil.

Traders are also feeling the strain. David Roy, a trader at Thakurgaon Sadar upazila, said he bought potatoes at Tk 8.75 per kg and sent 340 sacks to Jashore by truck two days ago. Intense heat ruined 15 to 16 sacks during the journey.

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Building the A Team

MAHTAB UDDIN AHMED

In many offices, teamwork means eight people joining a meeting, three speaking, two pretending their internet is unstable, one sharing the wrong screen, and the rest saying, "Fully aligned." By the end, no one knew who would do the work, but everyone agreed it was a very productive discussion. That, sadly, is often called collaboration in modern corporate life.

In addition, we love to say, "Our people are our greatest asset." Then it approves a glittering office renovation, buys a few decorative slogans for the walls, and treats training as a luxury. Targets are sacred. Learning is optional. Culture is discussed at annual conferences, then abandoned in Monday-morning meetings. We often want high-performing teams without investing in that high performance, or just hire a few brilliant officers from other MNCs.

That is why the idea from a recent Harvard Business Review article deserves attention. The article argues that outperforming teams are not merely those with the best talent or the most polished plans, but teams that keep improving because they learn faster. A super team, therefore, is a disciplined unit that reflects, experiments, adapts, and sharpens itself continuously.

The business case is compelling. Gallup has found that highly engaged teams show 23 percent higher profitability and 18 percent higher sales productivity than less engaged teams. Its State of the Global Workplace 2026 report also notes that only 20 percent of employees worldwide were engaged in 2025, costing the global economy an estimated 10 trillion dollars in lost productivity. The World Economic Forum's Future of Jobs Report 2025 said employers expect 39 percent of workers' core skills to change by 2030.

Simply put, teams that do not keep learning will keep falling behind.

This message is especially relevant for Bangladesh.

Many of our top local corporates are strong in ambition, execution, and relationship management, but not equally strong in building a real learning culture. In too many companies, training is seen as an event rather than a system. Culture is reduced to a slogan. Learning budgets are often



the first to be cut, while managers are promoted for delivering numbers, not for developing people. The result is predictable: employees become efficient at routine work but weaker at adaptation, collaboration, and innovation.

The broader national context also reinforces this concern. The ILO's Bangladesh Skills for Employment and Productivity initiative highlights the need for higher-quality, more accessible skills development that is directly linked to jobs. That should be a warning to corporate Bangladesh. If the wider ecosystem still has skill gaps, leading firms cannot behave like passive spectators. They must become active builders of capability.

When learning stalls, meetings become ritual, managers become controllers, and talented employees either disengage or leave. Companies then complain about talent shortages after spending years neglecting systems that create stronger talent pipelines.

So how does a company create a super team? Leaders have to make learning part of work itself. Teams should review failures without blame, examine successes without arrogance, and reward curiosity instead of blind obedience. Managers must create psychological safety so people can challenge weak ideas before they become expensive mistakes.

In the coming years, this may be the real competitive advantage for Bangladesh. Capital can be raised. Technology can be purchased. Strategy can be copied. But a team that keeps learning, keeps improving, and keeps making one another better is far harder to imitate. That is what makes a super team.

So yes, building a super team is not about hiring a few stars, printing new values on the wall, and serving better coffee. If learning is ignored and culture is left on autopilot, the team will remain exactly what many companies already have: a crowded office with coordinated confusion.

The writer is the founder of BuildCon Consultancies Ltd and BuildNation Ltd

Iran war will leave lasting scars on energy market

REUTERS, London

One day after warning of the end of Iranian civilization, Donald Trump has proclaimed "a big day for World Peace". The US president's declaration of a two-week ceasefire to his war with Iran caused oil prices to plunge nearly 15 percent to \$94 a barrel on Wednesday morning as investors priced in the prospect of ships once again sailing through the Strait of Hormuz. But even in a best-case scenario, the scars from over a month of extreme trauma in the energy market will remain visible for years.

For a start, the ceasefire is tenuous. Exactly how Iranian and US armed forces will flip from fighting to working together to ensure tankers can safely navigate the narrow waterway which previously handled a fifth of global oil supply is unclear. Iran has an incentive to limit shipping volumes to maximise its negotiating leverage, while any big US vessels in the Gulf will be big potential targets. Tehran's demands – including lifting of all sanctions, financial compensation for war damage, and the right to continue to enrich uranium – will also be hard to square with what Trump and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu require to show their war has been strategically worthwhile.

But even if the president and his

counterparts in Tehran agree on everything, a return to the pre-war status quo when a barrel of oil changed hands for about \$70 faces multiple obstacles. First, the damage to Gulf energy infrastructure has been profound. Qatar has said Iranian attacks knocked out 17 percent of its liquefied natural gas capacity

for up to five years. Second, those facilities that escaped attack have shut in production after filling up local storage facilities in the absence of shipments. Big producers such as Saudi Arabia will likely hold back on a return to full production until they have more confidence that the ceasefire has legs –

a stance echoed on Wednesday by shipping giant Maersk. It could take up to four months for a degree of normalcy to return, one oil investor told Breakingviews.

A third factor is that countries will need to refill oil reserves that they have been running down for the last month, while some governments will now want to hold bigger buffers. This will raise global demand for crude oil. Iran's plan to charge ships a toll for safe Hormuz passage, as reported by the Associated Press, will also push up prices. If Tehran charged a \$2 per barrel fee on the daily flow of 20 million barrels, it would pocket almost \$15 billion a year – and potentially much more. Finally, oil investors will likely add a \$10 a barrel generic risk premium to the price of the black stuff to reflect the possibility of renewed fighting. Even if the US and Iran now end their five-week conflict, the global energy market will bear lasting scars.

Brent crude oil fell by 13 percent to \$95 per barrel on April 8, as of 0819 GMT, after US President Donald Trump said on April 7 he had agreed to a two-week ceasefire with Iran, subject to the immediate and safe reopening of the Strait of Hormuz.

"This will be a double sided CEASEFIRE!" Trump wrote on social media, after posting earlier on April 7 that "a whole civilization will die tonight" if his demands were not met.



The photo shows the fuel depot of Aral at the Ruhr Oel petroleum refineries of BP Gelsenkirchen GmbH in western Germany on April 7.

PHOTO: AFP